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ABSTRACT

The Young Adult Learning Academy (YALA) established by the Office of the Mayor of New York City serves dropouts aged 16 to 24 years of age who read below the eighth-grade level. Fourteen independent agencies recruit the students and provide services that include counseling, work maturity training, and job placement. During fiscal year 1990, YALA served 1,150 students. The programs include the City Works program of the New York City Department of Employment and the Youth Internship Program of the City University of New York. YALA provided basic educational services, counseling, world of work training, job placement, and work experience in child care to 41 youth enrolled in the Youth Internship Program. Comparison of scores on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) 3 pretest and TABE 4 posttest scores indicates students gained 1 year in reading and 0.4 year in math. Ten independent agencies have programs based on site at YALA, which provides offices and supportive services in addition to educational programs. In addition, YALA provided four offsite agencies with teachers, instructional support, and recordkeeping. Activities have had three major purposes: to help students assume more active roles in their own education; to build teacher collaboration and initiative; and to extend YALA involvement to a wider community of professionals. Two major issues for 1991 are to strengthen support services and improve the integration between school and work experience. (YLB)

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Young Adult Learning Academy (YALA): Summary of Program Information for the Period 7/1/89 - 6/30/90

In the end
You'll be the one who's sure to win
So keep on moving
Don't stop

You have a destination to be reached
You have no choice

You can do this.

Corinne Dixon, Student, from
YALA Journal VI.

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Background

In 1984, the Young Adult Learning Academy (YALA) was established by the Office of the Mayor to serve young people between 16 and 24 years of age who drop out of school and who read below the eighth grade level. Since then, more than 6,000 young adults have participated in YALA's educational programs. Many have serious, multiple obstacles to overcome before they can secure employment and self-sufficiency. YALA's students include significant numbers of single parents, youth in foster care and youth with a history of arrest.

YALA's services are made possible through a collaboration established by the Office of the Mayor and including that office, the City University of New York, the New York City Board of Education and the Department of Employment. Each agency provides resources and assistance to YALA's programs.

Fourteen independent agencies recruit the students and provide services that include counseling, work maturity training and job placement. YALA is the hub of a complex of services to dropout youth, unique nationally in terms of cooperation, scale and intensity.

The young adult population served by YALA and the independent agencies are a bellwether group for New York City. They struggle with all of the City's most perilous problems - economic, social and institutional. The results of their quest for self-sufficiency will affect significantly the City's future well-being. They are soon to be the workers, parents and community members. Today, their futures are uncertain.

At a time when crime threatens the social health of the City, young adults represent 42% of all felony arrests, but only 10% of the total population. When employers complain that they cannot find workers with skills, often it is these young people to which they refer. Low skills and lack of diplomas exclude many from participation in today's economy. At YALA, one third of all students and half the women have children to support. Research studies warn that many of these children will follow in the footsteps of their parents, dropping out and entering adulthood without the skills to establish independent lives.

YALA's services are designed to help dropout youth begin the transition to self-sufficient adulthood. Increasingly, national studies of dropouts are calling for programs similar to what has been developed at YALA already. The Grant Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship, for example, proposes demonstrations that:

> mount a coordinated and comprehensive program that meets the broadest possible range of youth's interests and needs and simultaneously mobilizes the diverse competencies of education and training providers in a geographic area. [1]

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1 Pathways to Success for America's Young Families, prepared by the William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship, Washington, DC., 1988. Page 138.

The following pages summarize YALA's most recent program year.

Summary for 1990

During the 1990 fiscal year, YALA served 1150 students, 876 on-site and 274 offsite. The programs served included the City Works program of the New York City Department of Employment and the Youth Internship Program of the City University of New York.

One thousand one hundred and nine (1,109) youth were served as part of City Works. Of the fourteen independent agencies, 10 have programs based on-site at YALA. YALA provides offices and a range of supportive services to these programs in addition to the educational program for their students. Four agencies are off-site; YALA provides them with teachers and instructional support as well as record-keeping for attendance and enrollment.

Forty-one (41) youth enrolled in YALA as part of the Youth Internship Program (YIP), a collaborative effort with Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC).[2] For these youth, YALA provides counseling, world of work training, job placement, work experience in child care along with basic educational services. These students are between 17 and 21 years of age. About half the YIP students participated in an experimental ESL and work experience program.

Because YIP is a small program, it has enabled YALA to demonstrate approaches for adaptation to the City Works component as well as to other programs. The most successful of these efforts are:

1. conducting education first, followed by work experience (in City Works, education and work experience alternate on a two week schedule).

2. using an academic milestone to determine completion: students must complete 200 hours in class prior to commencing their work experience

3. closely integrating academic and occupational instruction and the counselor and teacher-mentor roles.

4. providing training and work experience in child care.

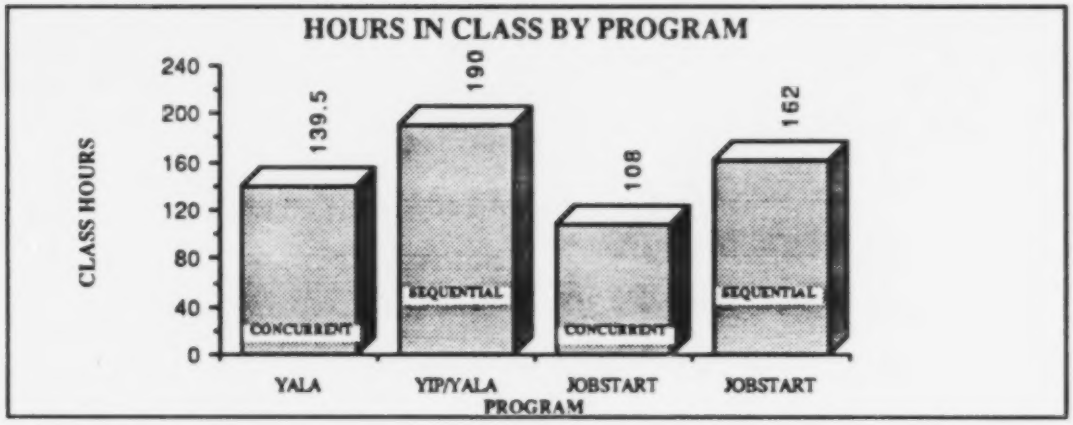
5. conducting an ESL program with a work experience component

Among all on-site students at YALA, the average hours in class was 139.5. (The offsite

2 A total of seventy-one students participated in YIP's program of sequential education and child care training. Forty-one of these were enrolled under the BMCC funding stream and 30 were enrolled under the City Works funding stream.

students averaged 137 hours in class).[3] The on-site hours in class represent an increase of 13 hours over the previous year and compare positively with averages in other programs for adults. For example, in Jobstart, the national demonstration for a similar population conducted by MDRC, students averaged 108 hours in education for concurrent school and work programs and 162 hours in education for sequential programs. The YALA average was 139.5 hours for concurrent programs and 190 for the sequential program.

The YIP program proved especially successful as students averaged 190 hours in class. The combination of intensive education followed by work experience, with tight integration of counselor-teacher functions, and of occupational with academic classes all contributed to this outcome.



Academic gains: On-site YALA students were pre-tested on the TABE 3 in reading and math and post-tested on the TABE 4. Five hundred and nineteen students were both pre- and post-tested after an average of 20 hours in reading classes and showed a gain of one year; in math the gain was .4 year.

The demographic profile of YALA's on-site students is similar to that of the previous years.

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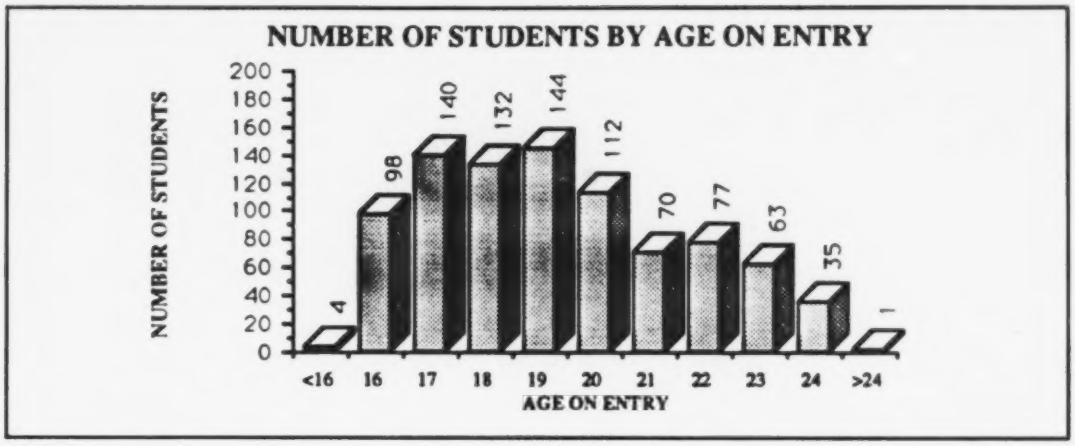
3 YALA's on-site attendance procedures are exceedingly rigorous. An instructional hour is discounted if a student is out of class for ANY reason for 15 minutes or more. Attendance averages are based on all students who have enrolled in the program where enrollment constitutes one full day in class. Attendance records are closely scrutinized by counselors, students and teachers and corrected each day when necessary. YALA procedures tend to result in outcome figures that are conservative relative to other programs.

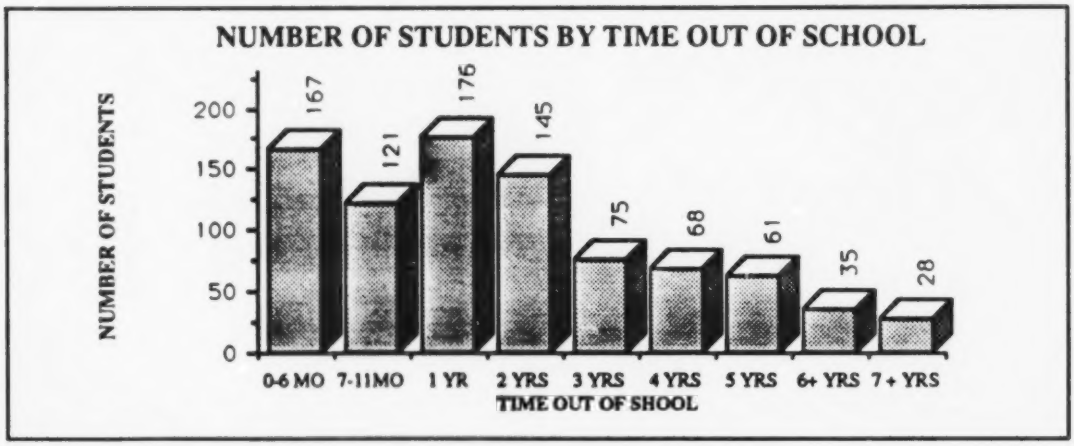
While YALA receives full records for offsite students, this information is not collected by YALA staff and cannot be reported with equal assurance of accuracy and rigor. For this report, on-site figures are cited, primarily.

The median age at YALA was 19.5 years.

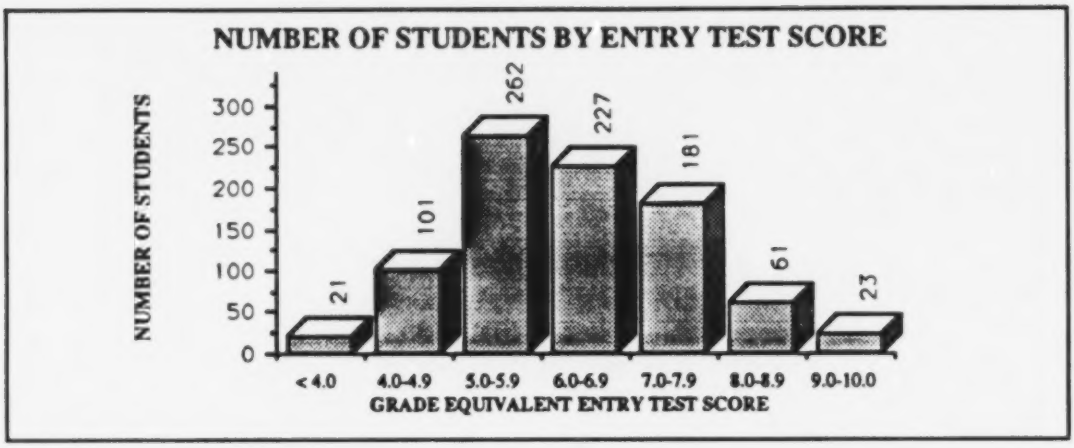


The number of teen parents at YALA was 268. This represents 30.6% of the total number of students.

The average length of time out of school on entry to the program was 2.4 years.



The average reading score on entry at YALA was 6.2. The average reading score on exit was 7.3.



Major Activities and Events during the period

> *I hadn't been to school for 13 years. So I didn't know much about math. It was like starting over again. I didn't think I could do it, but I am. My progress in math has absolutely amazed me.*
>
> Tahirah Whitmore, Student, in
> YALA's Making Math Personal

Three major purposes determined the activities described in this report: 1) to help students assume more active roles in their own education; 2) to build teacher collaboration and initiative; and 3) to extend YALA involvement to a wider community of professionals concerned with the well-being of economically poor young adults.

Student Leadership was a major concern, growing from the conviction that YALA students must assume more responsibility for their own educations if they are to change their lives. The students in the leadership program conducted an assessment of YALA with the help of a professional evaluation consultant. This study concentrated on instruction, but looked at a wide range of YALA programs and activities. The conclusions focused on the importance of the quality of teaching and the need for instructors to make certain that students understand the goals of the classes. YALA administration will address their recommendations in the 1991 term.

Students also conducted a series of events including voter registration, several dances and a talent show. Funds collected for these events were contributed to a local charity, Hale House. Students helped to arrange and video-taped visits to important community figures including the Manhattan Borough President and Reverend Calvin Butts.

YALA staff assisted students to create many special programs and activities. There were seven publications, including the professionally produced *Journal*, a book of myths and several student newsletters as well as three class literary books. Students produced a series of short advertisements in video, addressing current issues such as drugs and the urban environment. One class conducted entrepreneurial projects that included market surveys, advertising and financial record keeping. Classroom activities concentrated on building greater understanding in accounting, economics and marketing.

Teacher Training Activities: YALA conducted frequent workshops directed at improving teacher skills. These activities were in addition to extensive assessment and planning for the next year's activities.

Among the most interesting staff development activities were workshops centering on racial relationships within the school. These addressed questions such as: Are Black teachers more effective than Caucasian teachers in helping Black students? What is the impact of teacher social class differences as compared to racial differences? These discussions and activities were useful in developing sensitivity, making each staff member more aware of the feelings of others and bringing out issues that all recognize are important, but many have difficulty addressing openly.
YALA provided monthly teacher training workshops for the offsite projects; when these became known, Federation Employment and Guidance Service, Economic and Manpower Corporation and other agencies that do not collaborate with YALA asked to send their teachers as well and these were welcomed.

Several staff persons arranged a training program for learning disabilities using resource people from the Borough of Manhattan Community College. They will continue the training during the coming term and will serve as resource persons in learning disabilities for other staff.

An especially successful project was Jeopardy. Initiated by math instructors, the entire school participated in the Jeopardy game for nearly a month. Math and science questions were developed and teams competed with each other as their classmates cheered them on. Winners were awarded T-shirts and other prizes. This effort as part of Math Month created a great deal of energetic interest in math and science.

As YALA has become better known, local and national organizations have shown increasing interest in its program. *Vocational Training News* produced a lead article on YALA for May 10, 1990; this followed articles last year in *Youth Record* (October 19, 1989) and in the journal *Equity and Choice* (May 1989). YALA was described in the publication, *Youth and Literacy* of the Literacy Assistance Center (June 1990). The national Youthbuild Coalition conducted a week-long training conference at YALA for groups from throughout the country. And YALA was consulted by organizations involved in formulating the new JTPA legislation.

Finally, renovations and new furniture for the first floor, proposed in 1986 by independent agencies and generously funded by the Department of Employment, were largely completed in the Spring of 1990. The result is a warmer and more comfortable space for students and a calmer atmosphere for all.

MAJOR ISSUES for 1991

> *When you have a child, you cannot continue your education...The time spent with the child could have been spent preparing yourself with a better education so that you could offer to your child something that has been completed, not something that was just halfway done.*
>
> Frances Hernandez, Student
> in YALA Journal V

As YALA has planned for the 1991 fiscal year, two issues have been paramount: to strengthen support services and improve the integration between school and work experience.

Support services are essential to enable students to complete their educations. Studies of the program as well as the experience of participating staff all point to the fact that even students who do not complete find the program helpful. External causes such as lack of child care and health problems often force students to leave YALA. To strengthen supportive services, YALA worked closely with independent agency staff to identify major issues and problems. With their assistance, YALA raised $90,000 in private funds as well as some public monies to provide support in child care and parenting for the coming year. [As this report is being written, the Office of Child Care Support and Advocacy for Parents is open and thriving!]

Health services must also be addressed and YALA staff now are discussing with experienced physicians the possibility of raising funds to place a nurse practitioner at the site.

The mutual reinforcement of experiences at school and at work is another objective of the program. YALA has sought to accomplish this integration through two strategies. First, the program provides occupational training and exploration in several areas that relate to student work experiences and career objectives: office skills, computer operations, building maintenance, child care and video skills.

Secondly, YALA staff have developed an assessment system that parallels tasks and demands of the workplace. YALA's Level Assessment Portfolios (LAP) require students to develop and perfect a body of work for presentation to an assessment panel. The LAP strategy is designed to build work-related skills in coordination of diverse tasks into a single product, quality control, and self-presentation.

This year, in cooperation with the Department of Employment, YALA upgraded the LAP system and made it the central component of student assessment within the program.

IN CONCLUSION

The kind of comprehensive program that we at YALA have been gradually putting into place is like that recommended by the Grant and other national groups looking at the needs of dropout youth.

> The Commission recommends expansion of flexible, long-term and comprehensive education, training and employment programs to give truly disadvantaged young people added chances to succeed. These programs should be tailored to individual needs and provide the assistance that will make success possible including help with day-care, transportation, housing, health care and training allowances. [4]

While this is the goal, many of the components that make YALA comprehensive have been developed through special or private funding and are not yet institutionalized as part of the core program support. Thus, a primary concern in the coming years is to institutionalize these components as part of the core YALA program.

YALA looks forward to the 1990 term with optimism. Strong working relationships with independent agencies allow a high degree of cooperation to benefit students. YALA continues to experiment with new program structures and activities. The core staff of instructors, assisted by an extremely able and devoted support staff, is mature, experienced and caring.

> *If you honestly want to succeed in your future, it's up to you to look at yourself and see the mistakes you have made in your life. Only you can change yourself for the better, for the future...Work very hard at your goal and the teachers and counselors here at YALA will do all they can to help you on your way for the future.*
>
> Carol Adams, Student
> in YALA Journal V

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4 The Forgotten Half, Pathways to Success for America's Youth and Young Families, The William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship. Op. Cit.